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THE AUSTRIAN PROBLEM ¹

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IT has become almost axiomatic that in order to organize the world for a permanent peace, the suppressed nationalities must be freed; that no government not based upon the consent of the governed should be tolerated. To speak of the liberation of suppressed nationalities means to speak of Austria-Hungary, a state concerning which Mr. Ramsay Muir recently said that its history may be epitomized in the statement that it is a constant struggle against the realization of the principle of nationality.

The Austrian, or Hapsburg, policy of suppression of non-German nationalities began prior to the Thirty Years War. The original Austrian confederation was a free union of Austria proper, Bohemia and Hungary. These nations saw in this federation a stronger barrier against the menacing Turkish aggression. The centralizing policy of the dynasty led to a Bohemian revolt in 1619, the deposition of Ferdinand the Second as king of Bohemia, and the election of Frederick the Elector Palatine as king of Bohemia. But the Czech nobility was defeated in the battle of White Mountain in 1620, and since then a régime of terror and Germanization reigned in Bohemia. At the same time, the Hapsburgs unlawfully and by violence suppressed the ancient rights of Bohemia.

The ruthless Hapsburg policy of extermination of the best element in Bohemian national life is best illustrated by the fact that when the Peace of Westphalia was concluded, Bohemia was little better than a desert with about eight hundred thousand impoverished inhabitants, while prior to the war she was a prosperous country with more than three mil-

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lion inhabitants. At one time, in the middle of the eighteenth century, it seemed that Czech national life had come to an end. The policy of Germanization seemed to be successful.

Austria-Hungary not only always opposed the legitimate ambitions of her own nationalities, but probably because of this very home policy, her foreign policy was ever dictated by a desire to smother elsewhere tendencies aiming at the liberation of subject nationalities and their unity in national states. Whoever fought for the right of any nationality to develop freely became an enemy of the Austrian state.

When, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, the Greeks rose against the Turks, they found one of their worst enemies in the Austrian government. Greek independence was recognized only as a result of the insistence of the Allies of today—Russia, France and England. It is an interesting fact that President Monroe, in his message formulating the doctrine which now bears his name, also advocated the recognition of Greek independence, so that when we speak of the Allies of today we can properly add the United States of America.

When, in the thirties, the Belgians rose against the domination of the Dutch, it was again Austria assisted by Prussia which was ready to put down their movement with the sword; and the freedom of Belgium then, as now, was defended by the Allies of today—England and France. The whole history of the movement for the liberation and unity of Italy is a history of wars against Austria. Italy owes its liberation not only to the heroism of its own sons, but to the armed support of France and the diplomatic assistance of England. For a long time Austria was the enemy of German unity, which was made possible only after the defeat of Austria by Prussia in 1866.

But the continuous opposition of Austria to the principle of nationality may perhaps best be seen in her attitude toward the Balkan nationalities, and especially the Serbs. The Hapsburgs, when the Turks were forced to give up their conquests, did not liberate the Rumanians and Serbs, but simply annexed to the empire a large part of the lands inhabited by them in the hope of extending their dominion as far as Saloniki and the Ægean Sea. The erection of new independent national

states in the Balkans was not in accord with imperialistic aspirations, and Austria-Hungary developed into as dangerous an enemy of freedom for the Balkan nations as Turkey ever was.

The main reason why Austria was unsuccessful in her policy of penetration in the Balkan peninsula is to be sought in the rivalry of Russia, which, related to the Balkan nations both by blood and religion, pursued a policy directly opposed to that of Austria. While Austria was the enemy of independence for the Balkan nations, Russia favored the erection of independent states in the peninsula, and as a matter of fact every Russian victory over the Turks was followed by the creation of such an independent state. It would, of course, be naïve to claim that Russia did not have in mind the extension of her own influence, but it cannot be gainsaid that Russian understanding of Russian interests was consistent with freedom for oppressed Slav nations, while Austria saw her interests only in opposition to their liberation.

The crimes of Austria against the principle of nationality culminated in the infamous attack upon Serbia. This little country, strengthened by two victorious Balkan wars, formed a strong barrier against the Austro-German *Drang nach Osten*. The rise of the Serbian state of course created a desire on the part of Austrian Southern Slavs for national unity; Austria feared Serbia would become the Piedmont of the Balkans. For this reason Austria sought to destroy independent Serbia.

Under the Austro-Hungarian settlement (*Ausgleich*) of 1867, the Magyars were granted independence. This settlement is such that one half of the empire is under the domination of a German minority, while in the other the Magyars are supreme. And it is time for the world to realize that the Magyars are not the chivalrous nation they pretend to be. Their rule does not differ from Turkish in kind; it differs very little in degree.

Hungary has more than twenty million inhabitants; only nine million of these are Magyars, while the rest are Slovaks, Rumanians, Germans, Ruthenians, Serbs, Croatians and Slovenes. But the government is wholly in the hands of the Magyar nobility, which has a more complete sway in Hungary

than nobility has anywhere else in Europe. There are scarcely a million voters in Hungary, yet during the lives of men now living there has never been a Hungarian election that was free from violence and corruption, and that was conducted without the aid of soldiery. Seventy per cent of the land of Hungary is in the hands of the nobility, and as a result Hungary is a land of chronic hunger.

Under such Asiatic régime there live three million Slovaks, a branch of the Czech nation, a people subjected to the most violent persecution, a people that is not permitted to have a single secondary school. The Slovak press is being systematically persecuted. Under Magyar rule freedom of the press for non-Magyar nationalities is the remotest of dreams.

This is a condition that prevailed in times of peace; even then it cried to heaven for a remedy; but since the war broke out the situation of non-German and non-Magyar nationalities in Austria-Hungary beggars description. The meager right to use the Czech language in administrative offices in Bohemia has been abolished, and the so-called German state language (*Staatsprache*) *de facto* established. For instance, on railroads even the humblest laborer cannot obtain any kind of a position unless he has command of the German language. Political persecution knows no bounds. The government actually dictates to the newspapers what they may or may not publish, and even provides them with articles which they must print, or else suffer temporary or permanent suspension.

"Home rule all around" is not the way out of the Austro-Hungarian labyrinth. A consideration of the following figures will show that conclusively. The whole population of the empire is 52,000,000; 28,000,000 in the Austrian half of the monarchy; 22,000,000 in the Hungarian part; and 2,000,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to the latest census, that of 1910, the population of Austria is divided as follows: Germans, 9,950,225; Czechs, 6,435,983; Poles, 4,967,984; Ruthenians, 3,518,854; Slovenes, 1,252,940; Serbo-Croats, 783,334; Italians, 768,432. The Germans, although numbering not quite ten millions, control the destinies of the nineteen millions of non-Germans. In Hungary, according to the

same census, there are 10,050,575 Magyars; 3,949,032 Rumanians; 2,937,434 Germans; 1,967,979 Slovaks, 2,939,638 Serbo-Croats; 472,587 Ruthenians.

It should of course be remembered that the official census is grossly inaccurate, and misrepresents matters in favor of the Germans and Magyars. For instance, there is little doubt that there are almost 8,000,000 Czechs, and almost 3,000,000 Slovaks. In any event, the Germans and Magyars together do not exceed 20,000,000, and rule over 32,000,000 of Slavs and Latins, who in this war are forced to fight the battles of their oppressors.

Does not this recital furnish sufficient proof that the very existence of Austria is a negation of the principle of nationality? If there is to be permanent peace, if, to paraphrase one of President Wilson's statements to the Senate, the world's life is to be stable, if the will is not to be in rebellion, if there is to be tranquillity of spirit, and a sense of justice, of freedom and of right, the Austro-Hungarian state must go, even as the Turk must be driven from Europe. "Home rule all around" would be possible only if the dual monarchy should be preserved in its entirety; but this would presuppose a continued violation of the principle of nationality and the right of the nations to choose the sovereignty which is to rule over them.

The Italians have a claim to the Trentino and a part of the Adriatic coast; the Rumanians claim Transylvania, the Serbs are entitled to Bosnia-Herzegovina; Croatia and Dalmatia should form with Serbia and Montenegro an independent Jugoslav state, and the Poles should be united with Russian Poland. These claims cannot be disregarded, but if they are duly observed, as they should be, the Czecho-Slovaks will be isolated, hopelessly outnumbered by Germans and Magyars in a smaller Austria, which will continue to co-operate with Germany in her imperialistic endeavors and constitute a foundation for another attempt to realize the Middle Europe scheme.

The only solution of the problem appears to be the joining of the fragments of those races, which already have their national state, to the parent races; the creation of an independent Bohemian state; of an independent Hungary, reduced of

course to its proper ethnical boundaries, permitting the Austrian Germans, in the purely German provinces of Austria, to decide their own destinies. They could either form an independent state or else be absorbed into the German Empire. This arrangement, by the way, would not strengthen Germany as some claim, since it must be remembered that if the principle of nationality is carried out to its logical conclusion, Germany will lose at least a part of Alsace-Lorraine and Schleswig-Holstein, as well as Poland, so that what she may gain on the one hand she will lose on the other. Moreover, the present stand of Germany against the whole world is made possible because she has control of the 32,000,000 Slavs and Latins within the Austrian empire; once these peoples are liberated, Germany will lose this reservoir of human material; she will be correspondingly weakened, and her imperialistic designs will be thwarted.

The future Czecho-Slav state will have a population of more than 12,000,000, of whom 10,000,000 are Czecho-Slovaks. It goes without saying that the rights of the minority would have to be protected, although the fact is that the Slav races have never been known for their attempts to impose their language and culture upon other peoples. This seems to be exclusively the trait of the Germans, who couple their designs of economic penetration with a policy of denationalization of the people of the territories they control, or intend to control.

From an economic point of view, Bohemia will have an assured future, for she possesses all the natural resources necessary to an economically self-sustaining state. While she may not have an outlet to the sea, the example of Switzerland shows that a port is not specially necessary for an independent state. Again, the principle laid down by President Wilson as to economic rights of way for landlocked states would apply to Bohemia, as well as to the need of Russia to obtain access to a warm-water port. Bohemia, owing to her geographical position, and being a link between western Europe and the eastern Slav world, is destined to be of great political and economic importance. The fact that Bohemia was able for many centuries to oppose Germanization, that she had not suc-

cumbed, although surrounded on all sides by powerful enemies, is the best proof of her capacity to oppose the pan-German plans of expansion toward the east in the future, and to serve as a bulwark of permanent peace.

The federal formula has become wholly inapplicable to Austria-Hungary. The rise of the spirit of nationality is equivalent to a death-warrant for Austria. The longer the execution is delayed, the longer we shall have a condition which the President described as the ferment of whole populations fighting subtly and constantly against a rule not founded upon the affections or convictions of mankind.

It is gratifying that official circles in this country seem to have recognized the necessity of dismembering Austria-Hungary if German imperialistic aims are to be thwarted, if Middle Europe, with its consequent enslavement of whole populations, is not to remain a fact, if permanent peace is to prevail. A dispatch from Washington, dated May 26, indicates that an agreement was reached with the British and French war missions insuring harmonious action of the United States with the Allies for the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, this including the constitution of an independent Bohemia and the restoration of Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro, with Transylvania to be given to Rumania, Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia, and the Trentino and Trieste to Italy. This is a program which means freedom for the suppressed nationalities of Austria-Hungary and which will completely satisfy the American principle denying the right of existence to governments lacking the consent of the governed; for Czechs and Slovaks, by a solemn manifesto issued in Paris in November 1915, call for the erection of an independent Bohemian state; the Italians are hoping for the day when *Italia Irredenta* will be redeemed; the Rumanians expect the war to bring freedom to their brethren still suffering under Magyar oppression, and the South Slavs of Austria pray for a united Jugoslavia. This is not a policy of annexations, but simply a policy of justice. In this program the administration deserves the support of all people who think clearly and are not in the grip of obsolete formulas. It is an American program.